

SKYROCKETING LEVELS OF VIOLENT CRIME

Violent crime rates in Guatemala have risen to astronomical levels. According to the PDH, there have been 16,788 incidents of violence between January and June of this year, 15 percent more than the 14,606 cases recorded during the same period last year. Of this total, 1,662 people have been shot, 254 have been stabbed and 108 murdered with blunt instruments; there were also 43 strangulations and five lynchings. While an international outcry was mounted over the infamous murders of 300 women in the last decade in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, little attention is paid to the fact that one woman is murdered every day in Guatemala.

To strike a sardonic note, in the same month that the PDH announced these hideous statistics, Guatemala celebrated the 50th anniversary of the CIA-sponsored invasion that ousted democratically-elected Jacobo Arbenz president. This wanton act of intervention on Washington's part plunged Guatemala into a bloody civil war that pitched government forces against guerrilla commandos, resulting in the brutal murders and disappearances of more than 200,000 people over the decades. The impact of the war was so extensive that it militarized every aspect of society. Despite the arrival of a nominal peace agreement in 1996 with the UN-peace accords, the country has struggled to deal with its oppressive violence. Alfonso Portillo (2000-04), the first to be elected president after the peace accords, paid little better than lip service to the accords while allowing impunity to reign and endemic corruption to flourish, especially when it came to the special treatment he afforded the country's most notorious human rights violator, the infamous General Rios Montt.

NEW PRESIDENT, BUT NO NEW SOLUTIONS

When President Berger took office on January 14, a new opportunity for peace and reconciliation seemed to present itself. During his election campaign, Berger portrayed himself as a man firmly committed to democratizing Guatemala. He pledged to fight crime, corruption and poverty and to apply the still dormant provisions of the peace accord. However, since taking office, his policies have been somewhat less than coherent.

The cornerstone of his reforms has been a commitment to implementing the international community's recommendations; especially those aimed at reducing the size of the military, the institution that was responsible for many of the worst human rights atrocities during the country's 36-year-long civil war. Although Berger was seen as substantially reducing the military from 27,000 to 15,500 active members as well as spearheading a campaign to close 13 of the country's 60 military bases, these statistics are somewhat misleading. While his moves to demilitarize the country generated immediate praise from the international community, Marvin Perez of the Rigoberta Menchu Foundation asserted that more than 6,000 of these soldiers never actually existed. They were "ghost soldiers," the result of creative auditing by the previous administration to siphon money away from the government for alleged salaries and food parcels for senior personnel. Moreover, of the remaining 5,663 soldiers who agreed to take early retirement, 99 percent were infantry recruits. This means that the high-ranking members of the officer corps—those who were subsequently found responsible for 93 percent of the atrocities committed during the civil war—are likely to still be on active duty.

UNSUCCESSFUL PLAN OF ATTACK

Berger's latest plan to stop the wave of violence has been to triple the number of soldiers and police officers on joint patrol in

danger zones termed "red areas." Yet, the plan only makes it more likely that those who are now patrolling Guatemala's streets are the same military personnel who raped, tortured and murdered some 200,000 people during the civil war.

At a recent meeting in Washington, Vice President Eduardo Stein told COHA that the reason violent crime has reached a "level never seen before was because organized crime was reacting very violently against the reforms the government has enacted." Yet placing the blame on organized crime is too simplistic an answer to a complex question. Senior officials in the army and police force stand accused not only of being involved in this crime network, but of actually orchestrating criminal activities. If the government intends to blame today's increasing violence in Guatemalan society on shadowy networks of crime cartels, it must be willing to accept the involvement of its own functionaries in the country's burgeoning law and order calamity. Guatemala's historic tradition of violence will not be solved by simply increasing the presence of security forces on the streets. The problems are rooted too deeply in Guatemalan society for such superficial measures alone to be truly effective.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Berger is clearly vulnerable in the eyes of the Guatemalan population. His public approval rating has slipped from 83 percent (the level recorded at the time of his inauguration) to 48 percent according to the latest CID-Gallup poll published in *El Periódico*. This is further compounded by the significant protest of thousands of anti-government marchers—it is clear that Berger must take more assertive action if he wants to retain the populace's backing.

If the president wants to combat the situation, he must create an environment where every Guatemalan is equal in the eyes of the law. He needs to purge the military of not simply infantry soldiers, but also of those officers of superior rank who, as junior officers, planned and carried out unspeakable atrocities.

CONGRATULATING THE PEOPLE OF INDONESIA ON THEIR RECENT ELECTIONS

HON. JAMES A. LEACH

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 7, 2004

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, on September 20, 2004, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won a decisive victory in the final round of the first direct presidential election in the history of the Republic of Indonesia. However, the election was an even greater victory for the people of Indonesia in their remarkable transition to democracy.

This has been a pivotal year for democratic institutions in Indonesia. Indonesia has conducted not one, but three complex national elections in 2004. They were the largest single-day elections in the world, and involved hundreds of millions of ballots, and more than 500,000 polling stations spread across that vast archipelago. In April, I had the opportunity to visit the Indonesian National Elections Commission in Jakarta, and was impressed by the energy and determination with which its officials were confronting those logistical challenges. By any measure, their efforts were a profound success. Approximately 116 million

people voted in the final round of the presidential election, over 10 million more than voted in the last presidential election in the United States.

The people of Indonesia have effected credible, orderly, and peaceful elections of which they are deservedly proud. The magnitude of this accomplishment becomes apparent when we recall that Indonesia emerged from authoritarianism only six years ago, during an extended period of acute economic and social turmoil.

Other observers have correctly cited Indonesia as proof that Islam and democracy can coexist, but it is more than that. Civil Islam in Indonesia has not been merely passive or coincidental with democratization, it has been a catalyst. We understand and appreciate the critical role that Islamic civil society has played in promoting democracy in Indonesia. I fully expect that Islamic mass organizations, universities, pesantren, and non-governmental organizations will continue to play an important part in developing the political culture and public expectations necessary to make Indonesia's nascent democratic institutions truly representative.

We have high hopes for the new administration as it begins to address the significant challenges facing Indonesia. We wish them every success in promoting economic growth, peacefully resolving separatist and communal conflicts, improving the implementation of decentralization and regional autonomy, combating terrorism, and ensuring that the institutions that wield public power are fully accountable to the people of Indonesia. In sum, we share the aspiration of the Indonesian people for expanding and deepening the process of reformasi—the reformation of public institutions away from the corruption, collusion, and nepotism that have weakened them in years past.

I would like to extend my personal congratulations to President-elect Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President-elect Jusuf Kalla on their recent victory, and to thank President Megawati Sukarnoputri for her leadership and service to her country during the past three years. We look forward to the continuation of the cooperative relationship between our nations, and the steady growth in friendship between our peoples.

INTRODUCTION OF THE CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION ACT

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 7, 2004

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, today I am re-introducing legislation that is intended to help solve the shortage of available, affordable child care facilities. In my congressional district in New York City, more than half of all women with pre-school children are in the workforce and the need for child care is enormous. This is not a local problem but one that is national in nature.

The "Children's Development Commission Act" or "Kiddie Mac," will address this problem by authorizing HUD to issue guarantees to lenders who are willing to lend money to build or rehabilitate child care facilities. It also